

#### English Transcript for *Rhodes College: Part 4: Piece-by-Piece Evaluation*

We're back to put Lauren Sefton to work. >> [LAUGH] >> We're now going to hear about how Lauren and her colleagues in the admission office at Rhodes College use each piece of the application in their evaluation. Let's begin with those quantitative parts of the application. What do you look at and what are you looking for when you review a student's academic documents? >> The first and most important academic document is the student's high school transcript. >> Mm-hm. >> And we are looking for rigor of curriculum in that transcript, we are looking for academic trends. Of course we would love to see a student who has been a stellar student from the beginning of their high school career. >> Mm-hm. >> Taking all sorts of challenging courses and doing well in them. But we know often time that high school requires a bit of an adjustment. And if that's the case, we would much rather see a positive trend in grades heading up than a negative trend of grades heading down. >> Mm-hm. >> And so we are looking at trends, we are looking at overall rigor of curriculum and overall performance in that transcript. We are also looking at standardized test scores either the SAT or the ACT. And with the SAT, we mainly look at them, critical reading and math scores combined. >> Mm-hm. >> So our mid 50 % range on the SAT was 1210 to 1370 last year. We reserve the right to look at the the writings score especially for international students for whom English is not their primary language. Because that provides yet another confirmation of their English abilities. >> Mm-hm. >> And now with the ACT, if they choose to take the ACT instead of the SAT, our mid 50% range was 26 to 31. With an average score of either 27 or 28 on the ACT. If a school provides national examination results. >> Mm-hm. >> Then we will certainly look at those and we're in the context at that case of each individual country. >> Mm-hm. >> And they're certainly welcome to e-mail us. Students are certainly welcome to e-mail us with specific questions about their individual country's >> Mm-hm. >> Examination results, but typically our students are high-achieving students. >> Mm-hm. >> And so their scores usually reflect that as well. >> Mm-hm. >> Uh-hm, and then, finally, we also require the TOEFL or the IELTS for students for whom English is not their primary language. And we have a minimum score of 95 on the TOEFL or 7.0 on the IELTS exams. >> You mentioned previously that Rhodes is part of the common application, which requires one essay from all applicants. In your opinion, what makes a good essay? >> [LAUGH] The essay is my favorite part of the application to read. And I think most admission counselors will say the same thing. >> Mm-hm. >> And most students will tell you that the scariest part of the application is the essay. So, there's a bit of irony in there. But it is the one part of the application where the student's voice truly gets to come through. >> Mm-hm. >> If you think about it, the rest of the application is all fill in the blanks or check boxes or lists that we've asked for. And the essay is a big blank scary piece of paper where the student has a chance to share whatever it is they wish to share with us. >> Mm-hm. >> That they don't think we are going to have an understanding of, through the rest of the pieces of the, the application. And so for us it's really a chance to let the students voice come through and show that, that personality we talked about the five Ps. A lot of personality comes through in the essay. >> Mm-hm. >> I think the best essay is one that is authentic. >> Mm-hm. >> And we expect the essays do sound like it's coming from a 16 year old or 17 year old high school student. We know what that voice sounds like. >> Mm-hm. >> And we're not expecting it to sound like a 45 year old English teacher. And so, we're really looking for an authentic voice and an authentic story. honestly, I don't think that you can write an essay that I already read in some way, shape or form. Having done this for 11 years. >> Mm-hm. >> Most topics have been touched

upon. So, it's rare that I write a genuinely original essay in terms of creativity. But what I read everyday and love everyday are the essays that are genuine. And so it doesn't have to be genuinely original, it just has to be genuine. >> Mm-hm. >> And original to that student. >> Mm-hm. >> But maybe not an original topic. The common application provides essay prompts and those are posted online. Students can start working on their essay early. They will never go through their first draft and actually end up submitting that to our college. write, rewrite, rewrite again, put it away for two weeks, come back to it again and then rewrite it. >> Mm-hm. >> Because you'll go through several variations to figure out what's the authentic voice that you want to share with the admission committee. And I always say to figure out what that authentic story and that authentic voice is. Is your essay should be so authentically you that if I were to take it, and it didn't have your name on the top of the paper. And I shuffled it in with 100 other anonymous essays and scattered them all across the floor, your best friend should be able to pick out your essay. Because nobody else but you, could have possibly written that story in that manner with that voice. >> Mm-hm. >> So, if your best friend can anonymously pick your essay out 100 other essays, you know you've done, you've done your job. >> As part of the Rhodes supplement to the common application, you ask for a second piece of writing. And in that supplemental requirement, you simply ask, why Rhodes? >> Mm-hm. >> So what is it you're hoping to learn from, from this question? >> Several things, actually. Including fit. We've talked about fit in this bef, interview before. And I think the why Rhodes question really speaks to why the student feels that Rhodes is the right fit for them. It also lets us know if the student took the time to do the research. Well let's start from the beginning it lets us know that the student has actually taken the time to write the response to why Rhodes. And so if they are willing to do that extra, extra step in writing a response that's specific to our college or university. We know they didn't just apply because they'd already filled out the common application and why not? They can just hit the submit button. So for us, it's a measure of demonstrated interest, it's a measure of fit. It lets us know that the student done the research. That they have been thoughtful in the admission process and college search process. They know Rhodes well enough to relate to why then can envision themselves there. And they're not just regurgitating the information on the website. I think that's really important. For many of our international applicants, I think they know our website better than we do. >> [LAUGH] >> It's amazing the information that they can tease out about classroom locations and professor's research projects and student clubs and organizations and leaders of those clubs and organizations. That information is available on our website, but in a, in a solid why Rhodes response, I'm not looking for a simple regurgitation of those facts. >> Mm-hm. >> I'm looking for processing of those facts. And an understanding from the student about how that might shape and relate their experiences at Rhodes over the next four years. >> Mm-hm. Just to step away from Rhodes for one quick moment. Many universities will ask similar why blank, why our university type of questions. Do you have advice to share with our students about answering those questions? >> Mm-hm. I do and it goes back to the original college search. And I think students really have to understand that the college search is a process of self-reflection. And they need to be able to answer two questions first, before they can be thoughtful in their own college search process. And then they can apply those answers to why, school x. >> [LAUGH] >> And the first question is, why do you want to go to college? If you can't answer that question, genuinely from the heart, then you probably shouldn't be applying to school x to begin with. The second question is what do you hope to experience or to gain over the next four years? If you, if a student can answer those questions. >> Mm-hm. >> With a specific college in mind first. >> Mm-hm. >>

So in the very beginning of their college search process. That's going to help them make much more thoughtful decisions in the application process. About, why they can explain certain institutions appeal to them. >> Mm-hm. >> And they'll be able to relate to those colleges or universities on a much more personal level. >> Mm-hm. >> Again, we're moving away from the regurgitation effects, and they can say, well, I want to go to a small liberal arts and sciences college. Excellent. Why? And then relate that to that particular university or college that they're applying to. >> You're right that is good advice. [LAUGH] >> I'm glad that, I'm glad that we kept that one. Perfect. So, bringing it back to Rhodes. At Rhodes, how important are these essays in the evaluation process. >> Mm-hm, I once heard a colleague of mine say that a solid essay can heal the sick, but it cannot raise the dead. >> [LAUGH] >> And that expression is absolutely true. >> Mm-hm. >> A solid essay can help bolster and support the academic foundation that already exist. The participation that we see within an application >> Mm-hm. >> But, if the academics aren't there. >> Mm-hm. >> Then it still can be the best essay I have ever read in my entire career. >> Mm-hm. >> And I still don't think Rhodes is going to be the right fit, because a student will not be successful over four years. >> Mm-hm. >> So it's a very important piece. >> Mm-hm. >> But it's not going to fix something that, is already broken if that's the case. I think for international students for whom English is not their primary language, the essay plays an even more important role. Because it allows us to have another outlet to understand their writing abilities, their comprehension abilities, their reading abilities. Are they answering the question that we asked? And so the essay, I think for our international students plays an even more important role than our domestic students. But for everybody, it's important but is not the be all and end all of the admission process. So all those hours of sleep that students are losing. >> [LAUGH] >> Over trying to write the perfect essay. >> Mm-hm. >> Take a breath, take a step back, you want to be careful, you want to be thoughtful, you want to proofread, you want to give yourself plenty of time. But there are a lot of other factors in the application process that are just as important if not more so. >> When we were discussing the requirements, you mentioned that Rhodes requires one academic letter of recommendation. In your opinion, what makes a good letter of recommendation? And how does a letter of recommendation factor into the admission decision? >> Mm-hm. A teacher recommendation gives us insight into the student. Not just the personality of the human being as an applicant, but to the student specifically. And so, I always encourage students to ask teachers to write letters of recommendation from someone who knows you well. >> Mm-hm. >> And somebody who can speak to your academic strengths. But also your academic weaknesses and talk about how you're addressing those weaknesses. >> Mm-hm. >> You teacher recommendation should talk about how you've grown as a student. >> Mm-hm. >> If you've had this teacher perhaps earlier in your high school career and now you're revisiting them, your third or fourth year. That gives us a chance to see some growth over the course of four years. >> Mm-hm. When a student fills out the common application, they will be prompted to submit school forms. How does Rhodes use school forms within the evaluation process of an applicant? Mm-hm, the school form is a very helpful in providing context in a variety of ways. Especially though for the transcript. >> Mm-hm. >> It allows us to get a sense of the curriculum that's offered at that school and how the student may have taken advantage of that curriculum. The school report form may provide class rank, if your school ranks. Can provide information about your GPA whether it's rated or unrated. And what the highest level of GPA a student could possibly achieve. >> Mm-hm. >> Or has achieved. >> Mm-hm. >> In that, in that class. It gives us a sense to have context of greater school performance. And part of the school report form allows whoever is

filling out that form to provide a commentary or a letter of recommendation along with it. So the counselor of recommendation is often times at least a one page letter. Not always, it doesn't have to be. But often times it's a one page letter that provides commentary on the student. And whereas, a student's teacher recommendation provides commentary on a student on that one particular classroom. The counselor recommendation will provide context for the students in the entire class or the entire school. >> Mm-hm. >> And in some cases of a school counselor isn't available to provide that context about curricula, curriculum changes or rigor of curriculum. Or school anomalies, transcript anomalies then even a student can provide that information. So, for example, maybe a student had Mono. And missed several classes, at one point during their, their second year of high school, because of health issues. Their grades were probably affected, and we wouldn't know about that. Unless it's shared with us either by the counselor or by the student at the, at the least. >> You touched on something very, very important. And it's a, a big concern with a lot of students, international students, that, that I've work with. Is that they don't have someone who is identified as a quote unquote school counselor. So, if, you know, what advice can you give to students who don't have someone with the title of counselor. Or even maybe someone who's not fluent in English to fill out one of those school forms. >> Mm-hm. The school report form is very important in our admission decisions, and so it's important that we have that information available. But we recognize that, a lot of schools don't have school counselors. And so in that case you may look a head of school or a head of class. Sometimes there is a, a teacher who is a head of class or a homeroom teacher that can provide that overall context. At the very least your'e probably taking English as a foreign language at your school and so being able to ask your English teacher. To either help respond to those questions and provide translation services for a head of school or filling out that form directly. I found at Rhodes, because it is such a, a personalized process, we want students to reach out to us and ask questions like that. And if they can provide an understanding of why the school report form is important. And provide context of who might be able to fill out a form that has that kind of information. Then we will willingly entertain other options if we know what those options are. I think it's better to ask and, and get advice than just assume that if you don't have a school counselor you shouldn't submit that form. For us that would be an incomplete application and so, we'd much rather talk through some of the possibilities with the student. And discuss whether it's an English teacher or a homeroom teacher or a head of school that might, or a principal that might be able to fill out that form for us instead. >> On your website, Rhodes strongly recommends that students who are not native English speakers conduct an interview through a service called InitialView. Can you tell us a little bit about the InitialView process and how that interview will be used in making the admission decision? >> Sure, InitialView was started in Beijing. And it's a company that provides unscripted, usually in person recorded interviews. It's a third party resource sort of providing unbiased interviews. And something that I love about them are they're, they're genuine conversations. They're discussions that are very similar to what you would have as a student on the campus, in the classroom, with a friend, with a professor, with a staff person. And they're recorded, and so we're able to share those InitialView interviews with other members of our admission committee. With faculty members, or with our international education office if we want a, a, an extra opinion on English capabilities. Those InitialView interviews provide two pieces of really valuable information. The first is English capability and competency and the second is interpersonal skills. And it's been really fun to, to watch those interviews and share them with others. Unlike a Skype interview that might just be between me and the applicant. I

can then you know if a student, if we have some concerns on paper about a student's English competency. In a Skype interview, all you have is my opinion on something. But I can go to our Dean or Admission Committee or to our English faculty members and say, listen to this, watch this interview. And you're going to see this student who is amazing, who comes alive in conversation, who is able to delve really deeply into questions and subject matter. And can express himself or herself in ways that we're looking for in our classroom experience. So it allows us to share those interview results with others on our campus. >> Again, just to briefly step away from Rhodes for a moment. I, I want to talk about those words, strongly recommend. Strongly recommend is a phrase that students see on a lot of university websites. From an, an admission counselor perspective, what does strongly recommend mean? >> I think it really means required. Well strongly recommend, it means we feel that this is an important piece of our admission puzzle that we're trying to put together. And if a student doesn't complete that piece, that might tell us something. It might tell us that they're not genuinely interested or they're not willing to take that extra step. And that could impact an admission decision for us strongly recommends, for example with our InitialView interviews. >> Mm-hm. >> There is a small cost attached to it for our students and so if the student can't afford to do an initial interview, InitialView interview. >> Mm-hm. >> We're not going to require it of students. So that's why it's not, a requirement for admission. But if the student has demonstrated to us that they have the ability to afford and they still don't do an InitialView interview. We're going to ask ourselves what does that mean. >> Mm-hm. >> And we may read into it more than the student thinks that we will. So generally I would treat strongly recommends as a requirement, unless you can provide a good excuse otherwise. >> Again to use the students that I've worked with as the example. A lot of them will say to me, you know, my high school was not like a U.S high school. We don't have organizations and clubs and activities. So, from the university perspective, do your expectations about activities, participation, interests, do they differ for an international student than they would for a US student? >> They do, for that exact reason. We understand that there are cultural differences in countries and between schools, really. And so, we do take that in to consideration. Although I'm finding that more and more applicants are able to find other outlets for those extra curricular activities. Even if your high school doesn't offer clubs and organizations. I'm still finding especially in the last five years more and more international applicants who have been very proactive in seeking out other opportunities. Whether it's community service through another organization that's not school related or starting their own service project. Because they've read about things online on the Internet. They think that it would be helpful to bring something like that to their own community. And they take the initiative to, to do that. A lot of our European students aren't participating in sports and athletics through their high schools. But a lot of them are participating in community teams and club teams. So we'll see that for a lot of students. They find other outlets. You know, community service was not something that we saw a lot of from our Chinese applicants ten years ago. We're seeing a lot more of it now. So, it was certainly never an expectation previously. But it's slowly becoming one because students are being very proactive and taking the initiative. They're self starters. And that's something that we really value on our campus. And so if a student is going to take the initiative and be motivated to go above and beyond. And not just join a club because it was easy to sign up in their school cafeteria. That's really exciting, and it's exciting to think what they might do once they reach their U.S college campus home. >> So as, as a follow-up to that, you mentioned that in the past, it wasn't an expectation. But you see it more and more. So how important are, you know interests

and activities and, and participation? How important are those in the admission decision? >> Mm-hm, I think they're very important, remember one of those five P's was participation. >> Mm-hm. >> And so I think having students that are engaged in the community. Beyond the classroom setting is incredibly important. Especially at a small school like Rhodes with 2,000 students. And most of our students living on campus and a hundred clubs and organizations. There's an expectation that students will be involved in multiple clubs and organizations. Otherwise, we'd never support over 100 clubs and organizations for such a small, small campus. And it's part of a cultural norm. I honestly can't think of a single student, international or domestic, who's only involved with one club at Rhodes. They're all involved in multiple clubs and organizations and activities. And so that's sort of what looking at the right fit. >> Mm-hm. >> means. It's looking to see, are you the type of student that's going to jump in with both feet and be part of our community. >> Mm-hm. >> And not just part of our classroom. Because I think at a place like Rhodes you learn just as much outside the classroom as you do inside the classroom. So I would say extra curricular activities are very important. But there is not a magic, a golden key or magic activity. >> Mm-hm. >> There's no you know if you join this club. >> Mm-hm. >> You're automatically granted admission. >> Mm-hm. >> And I think that works to our international students' benefits, because so many clubs and organizations are different. They don't, they aren't right out of a high school. Or they don't look the same as their U.S. counterparts. That's also a piece. I'm, I'm glad you brought this up Eric. Because I think something that we miss sometimes with students applications is that they list the activities that they are involved in. But they don't provide any sort of context or clarification. >> Mm-hm. >> And if you just list the title of a club or even worse, the acronym of title of a club or community organization or civic project. >> Mm-hm. >> We may not know what that is. So I think it's very important for students to spend that extra time, developing that resume. Clarifying the information that's on the resume and making sure that it presents student in the best light. This is the opportunity as we say in English to toot your own horn. [LAUGH] >> And we want students to really be self-advocates in the process, and talk about the things that they are doing. Because they're doing great things. >> Mm-hm. >> They're doing some really exciting things. And we want to have the chance to explore those options and see if that's something that we want on our campus too. >> Something that is written about a lot and students come across this term but may not understand what it means is demonstrated interest. Does Rhodes factor demonstrated interest into the admission decision. And why or why not? >> Mm-hm, Rhodes very much factors demonstrated interest into our admission decisions. And it's something we pay even more attention to in the last couple of years, than when I first started working at Rhodes. We just like students want to know that we're interested in them as a college. We like to know that they're interested in us. And we do pay so much attention to fit that we want students to, to really research that and figure out, is this the right fit? And simply sending us an application isn't enough to signal to us alone that you think Rhodes is the right fit for you. So we do very much look at demonstrated interest. We emphasize it a bit more heavily for our domestic students because we recognize that it's easier to visit campus. >> Mm-hm. >> If you're in the U.S. >> Mm-hm. >> And we're more likely to visit your high school or your home city. >> Mm-hm. >> With just two of us traveling internationally we're really excited to reach all throughout South America and Asia. But we don't travel to Europe, for example. So there's no expectation that we would visit with a student in Europe. >> Mm-hm. >> When we don't even travel there. >> Mm. >> So I think for s, for international students we look at demonstrated interests. We still look at demonstrated interests but in a slightly different way. We'll, pay attention to whether a student

requests an interview, a Skype interview. We pay attention to whether a student asks if they can be put in touch with current students. We read a lot into the why Rhodes, supplemental essay. To get a feeling of has this student done their homework and that they're not just applying to Rhodes on a whim. >> Mm-hm. >> And so we're really trying to read between the lines to figure out does this student really want to be at Rhodes. Because we would like to admit students who are likely to enroll, who are excited about Rhodes. And so we do look at demonstrated interest, very much. >> So among the pieces, are there, you know, some common warning signs that you see with an international application specifically that sometimes lead to denials? >> Mm-h, there are, mainly in international applicants with whom English is not their primary language. And the biggest warning sign that we see is that they don't meet the minimum English competencies. They have below a 95 on the TOEFL, they have below a seven on the IELTS. Or we've done an interview and, it hasn't gone well. >> Mm-hm. >> And so for students that don't meet the English proficiencies. That's a pretty quick decision for us to make. Because we know academically they're not going to be successful with the level of reading and writing that's expected of a Rhode's student. Also in a similar vein, if there is a big disparity between standardized test scores and the writing samples. Perhaps their scores are really low and their writing samples are amazing. That sometimes leads us to question the authenticity of those writing samples. And the reverse, the scores are very high, but the writing samples are not solid. That leads us to wonder how they're going to do in the amount of writing that they have to do as a Rhodes student. So anytime there's a disparity, between those writing samples and test scores. Or sometimes we'll see disparities between the two writing samples. The essay from the common application as well as the supplemental essay. If they look like they've been written by two different people, that makes us have that makes us raise a question in our mind about the authenticity of the student's application. >> And we'll be right back with the final piece of our interview with Lauren Sefton. [BLANK\_AUDIO]